

For Immediate Release: April 2, 2009

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WARM WINTER WEATHER CITED FOR FIRST-OF-THE-SEASON MOSQUITOES THAT TEST POSITIVE FOR WEST NILE VIRUS IN CONTRA COSTA COUNTY

-District reports first virus-positive mosquitoes for 2009; Nine weeks earlier than last year

CONCORD, CALIFORNIA - - A group of mosquitoes trapped in Martinez on March 27 have tested positive for West Nile virus, the first virus-positive group in Contra Costa County this year, nine weeks earlier than the first positive mosquitoes last year, and the first time ever before infected birds have been found.

“The first virus-positive group of mosquitoes is significant,” said Deborah Bass, spokeswoman for the District. “It means that mosquitoes have the virus and are capable of infecting anyone of any age, at any time. Wearing mosquito repellent and maintaining or dumping outdoor water sources remain the best precautions people can take. Residents can also continue to report dead birds to the hotline which remain crucial to our surveillance and control efforts.”

One of the suspected mechanisms for the re-introduction of West Nile virus each year is that infected female mosquitoes 'hibernate' over the winter and emerge the next season to start the cycle again. One reason for the infected mosquitoes to emerge so early this year could be due to the unusual warm weather experienced in January when temperatures reached nearly 80 degrees.

Since the arrival of West Nile virus in Contra Costa County in 2004, 27 people have been documented with the disease and two have died. Most people who are bitten by a mosquito with WNV will not get sick; however, up to 20 percent of the population infected with WNV will get West Nile fever. West Nile fever causes people to experience mild to severe flu-like symptoms such as fever, headache, body ache and possible paralysis. Less than one percent of infected individuals will require hospitalization. The elderly and those with compromised immune systems are most susceptible to illness and death caused by WNV.

Residents are urged to take the following precautions:

- **DEFEND** yourself against mosquitoes by using a repellent with an effective active ingredient such as DEET, Picaridin or Oil of Lemon Eucalyptus. Make sure to follow label directions.

- DRAIN all sources of standing water that may support mosquito-breeding habitats. Residential sources can be a big producer of mosquitoes in Contra Costa County.
- DOOR and window screens should fit tight and be in good repair. This will prevent mosquitoes from entering your home.
- DO vaccinate your horses. Horses are highly susceptible to West Nile virus – approximately half of the horses that get WNV die or have to be euthanized
- DAWN and DUSK are times to avoid being outdoor since this is when mosquitoes are most active.
- DRESS appropriately by wearing long sleeves and pants when outdoors and mosquitoes are present.
- DEAD birds should be reported to the California Department of Public Health's Dead Bird Hotline at 877-WNV-BIRD (877-968-2473) or on their Web site <http://www.westnile.ca.gov/>. Not all birds will be picked up and tested, but reporting dead birds provides crucial information for mosquito control efforts.

To learn if the District is spraying for adult mosquitoes in Contra Costa County, please visit the district's Web site at www.ccmvcd.dst.ca.us or call the District at (925) 771-6195 for a recorded message. **Adult mosquito spray notifications by email are also available** by signing up on the Web site.

Contra Costa Mosquito & Vector Control District is located at 155 Mason Circle in Concord. Call the District to report mosquito problems at (925) 771-6195, or visit their office between 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. to get FREE mosquitofish for ornamental ponds or horse troughs.

For information concerning human West Nile virus symptoms, prevention, or testing, please call the Contra Costa Health Services department at (888) 959-9911 or visit their website at www.ccpublichealth.org

For information concerning West Nile virus and horses, please visit the California Department of Food and Agriculture Animal Health Branch at www.cdffa.ca.gov/ahfss/ah/wnv_info.htm or call them at (916) 654-1447.